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March 16, 1959

Hon. John E. Fogarty  
House Office Building  
Washington 25, D.C.

Dear Representative Fogarty:

I understand you are opening hearings this week on appropriations for the National Institutes of Health programs in medical research.

This program has been so inestimable a contribution to the national welfare that any remarks I might make in its support should be an obvious and unnecessary formality. However, the enclosed report by Dr. Rusk, from the New York Times, may seem to make it necessary to restate the obvious!

But why spend much rhetoric on this. No one in my knowledge has ever expressed a considered doubt of the value of the program of research in the medical sciences, and the certainty that it will repay the investment many times over not only in the health, happiness and longevity of our citizens but even in the crassest terms of recapture of taxes from their greater productivity. The scientists of this country have unmitigated confidence in the administration of the NIH, whose leaders and workers have proven to be perceptive, responsive and dedicated men.

Although we have made remarkable progress in the past decade, it would be a mistake to assume that we have begun to saturate the needs for financial support of research, especially in the basic sciences underlying medicine. It is probably true that most circumscribed projects of obvious merit that are now spontaneously submitted by our existing roster of scientists are likely to find support. However, there is urgent need to improve the facilities for health research and connected graduate training, and to strengthen the programs for the training of our future scientists. Projects of larger scope, especially those involving the assembly of scientists with complementary skills and insights are costly, and at this time too costly to be sure of winning merited support -- and if they do, as I can testify from my own experience, it may be at the expense of the time of scientists whose access to their own laboratories should be more jealously protected against the demands for such distractions.

May I take the occasion to make a particular plea for the reinstatement of funds for health research facilities, and also for the relaxation of unrealistic restrictions which would separate these from facilities for research training and related educational functions. I am sure you will be acquainted with the 'Second Annual Report of the Surgeon General... under Title VII of the Public Health Service Act', dated January 15, 1958, with whose conclusions I am in full accord.

Yours sincerely,

Joshua Lederberg  
Professor of Genetics